

Denmark

 freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/denmark

Freedom of the Press

Freedom of speech is protected in Section 77 of the constitution, and the government generally respects this right in practice. However, legal restrictions exist for libel, blasphemy, and racism. In August 2013, the Copenhagen-based international satellite television station Roj TV filed for bankruptcy after the Eastern High Court upheld its hefty fine of 10 million Danish kroner (\$1.8 million). Roj TV was found guilty of “promoting terrorism” by the Copenhagen City Court in 2012 because of its connection with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), a separatist militant group operating in southeastern Turkey that is regarded as a terrorist organization by the European Union and other entities. By the end of 2013, Roj TV had filed an appeal case at the Supreme Court.

A new Access to Information law was ratified by the Parliament in June 2013. The controversial law prevents access to political documents between ministers and their advisers. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) expressed concern over these provisions, which may limit transparency in government and legislative proceedings.

Print, online, and broadcast media are regulated by the Danish Press Council, whose eight members are jointly appointed by the president of the Supreme Court and journalists’ associations. Participation is mandatory for broadcast media and print outlets that publish at least twice a year; online media that choose to register receive the legal protections afforded to traditional journalists. If an outlet is found to have committed an ethical violation, the council can order it to publish the ruling; failure to do so can result in a fine or up to four months in jail, though these sanctions are rarely used. The current system has been undergoing a revision process in recent years, with politicians and victims of violations calling for stricter controls.

The aftermath of the 2005 controversy over cartoons of the prophet Muhammad still affects the Danish media both in terms of direct threats made against journalists and media houses and through a considerable chilling effect on coverage of related issues. In May 2013, the Norwegian Supreme Court upheld the 2012 sentence that found two Muslim residents of Norway guilty of planning a bomb attack on the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, which originally published the controversial cartoons. The cartoonist at the center of the controversy, Kurt Westergaard, continues to receive round-the-clock protection by the authorities after a failed assassination attempt in 2010. In February 2013, free speech advocate and former newspaper editor Lars Hedegaard—who is known as a strident critic of Islam—survived an assassination attempt at his front door. The assailant, dressed as a postman, shot at him at point blank range but missed, and fled by foot. At the end of the year no organization or individual had claimed responsibility for the attack, and the police were without leads. In 2012, the Danish Supreme Court had acquitted Hedegaard of making “insulting or degrading” statements about the treatment of women in Muslim societies. The statements were made in a private video that had been published on a blog without his knowledge.

The private print media are vibrant, although many papers have clear political sympathies. Two of the three largest daily newspapers, *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten*, are owned by the same company, but have separate editorial boards and journalistic staff. The third, *Berlingske*, also runs the state-funded public service channel Radio24syv, which first aired in 2011. Government subsidies and a value-added tax (VAT) exemption are vital for the press, and state support is available for struggling newspapers. The public

broadcaster DR (Danmarks Radio) is dominant in both radio and television, and is financed by a license fee. TV2 is a privately run but government-owned television network, while the private station TV3 broadcasts from England because of advertising regulations. Satellite and cable television are also available, as are a variety of internet-based news outlets. In 2013, 94 percent of the population had access to the internet.

2014 Scores

Press Status

Free

Press Freedom Score

(0 = best, 100 = worst)

12

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

2

(0 = best, 40 = worst)

5

(0 = best, 30 = worst)

5